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ABSTRACT

Probably no other concept comes closer to encompassing the core of personality psychology than the concept of the self. This teaching activity provides instructors with a self-contained teaching module--including lecture material, an in-class activity, suggestions for in-class discussion, and supporting references--on the topic of identity orientations, which take into consideration a recent development in the study of self-concept. It can be used to illustrate an example of a contemporary area of research on the topic of the self-concept and/or a topic to support more traditional lecture material on the topic of self-concept, such as self-esteem and self-monitoring. The activity can be used in both introductory or advanced psychology courses. (JDM)

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Running head: IDENTITY ORIENTATIONS: A TEACHING MODULE

Poster presentation at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, August 2001.

Identity Orientations: Definition, Assessment, and Personal Correlates:

A Teaching Module

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Identity Orientations: Definition, Assessment, and Personal Correlates: A Teaching Module

Probably no other concept comes closer to encompassing the core of personality psychology than the concept of the self. In fact, the great personality psychologist Gordon Allport (1961) described the self as "some kind of core in our being" (p. 110). The purpose of this teaching activity poster is to provide instructors with a self-contained teaching module, including lecture material, an in-class activity, suggestions for in-class discussion, and supporting references, on the topic of identity orientations, with regard to a recent development in the study of the self-concept.

Procedures

The following information can be used to help instructors begin to develop some supplementary lecture material on identity orientations.

Defining Identity Orientations

Historical Context of Identity Orientations: In discussing the dimensions of the self-concept at the turn of the century, William James, the founder of psychology in America, described two different aspects of the self: the spiritual self and the social self (James, 1890). For James, the spiritual self refers to an inner or personal sense of self—the thoughts and feelings that help define your sense of self. The social self refers to an external or public sense of self obtained through the recognition of others. As an indication of its importance, the distinction between the personal and public aspects of the self has gone through many psychological and sociological variations but has managed to survive some 100 years (Hogan & Cheek, 1983; Cheek, 1989). An excellent example of a contemporary illustration of the two aspects of the self is the concept of identity orientation proposed by Jonathan Cheek of Wellesley College (Banaji & Prentice, 1994).

Identity Orientations Defined: Identity orientation refers to the tendency for people to focus more attention and effort on their internal or external environment in defining their identity (Cheek, 1989). Identity orientations are labeled as either personal or social and include the following characteristic features:

Personal Identity Orientation: A personal identity orientation would describe a sense of self within an individual that reflects more of an internal emphasis, based on self-knowledge and self-evaluation. For example, such people would focus on their emotions, thoughts, ideas, beliefs, and personal goals to define their sense of self. Thus, personal identity reflects a more private sense of self.

Social Identity Orientation: A social identity orientation would describe a sense of self within an individual that reflects more of an external emphasis, based on interactions with and the reactions of others. For example, such people would focus on what others say about them or how others treat them in defining their sense of self. Thus, social identity reflects a more public sense of self (e.g., concerns about your popularity and reputation).

Assessing Identity Orientations

After defining and discussing the characteristic features of the personal and social identity orientations, instructors can introduce an in-class activity providing students with some firsthand experience with the assessment of identity orientations. This activity involves students completing a modified version of the 18-item Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ) (Cheek & Briggs, 1981, 1982). The instructor starts this activity by distributing a handout containing the following instructions and eight items:

Instructions: Answer the following eight items using this scale:

1 = Not important to my sense of who I am

2 = Slightly important to my sense of who I am

3 = Somewhat important to my sense of who I am

4 = Very important to my sense of who I am

5 = Extremely important to my sense of who I am

____ 1. My emotions, thoughts, and feelings

____ 2 The reactions of others to what I say or do

____ 3. My moral values and personal standards

____ 4. The impression I make on others with my mannerisms

____ 5. My private self-evaluations and personal opinions of myself

____ 6. How popular I am with other people

____ 7. The personal goals and hopes I have for myself in the future

____ 8. How attractive other people find me

Scoring the Modified AIQ: The extent to which the student's answers reflect a personal identity orientation can be examined by totaling the responses to items 1, 3, 5, and 7. The extent to which the student's answers reflect a social identity orientation can be examined by totaling your responses to items 2, 4, 6, and 8. The higher the score for each set of items, the more the student's responses reflect that particular orientation.

Post-Activity Discussion: To supplement this material on defining the two identity orientations, instructors can generate some in-class discussion by asking students to provide other examples of individuals they have encountered (e.g., co-workers, former classmates) or to identify characters from popular television programs (e.g., "Friends") who tend to manifest either a personal (e.g. the free-spirited Phoebe character of "Friends") or social (the fashion-obsessed character of Rachel on "Friends") identity orientation.

Personal Correlates of Identity Orientation

To illustrate to students how identity orientation might serve to influence such important decisions as occupational choices, instructors can mention the work of Leary, Wheeler, and Jenkins (1986), who proposed that certain occupations offer greater personal rewards (e.g., self-fulfillment) while others offer greater social rewards (e.g., social status). Based on this distinction, they proposed a relationship between identity orientation and occupational preference. In support of their reasoning, they found that people with a high sense of personal identity expressed a preference for occupations that emphasized personally relevant job outcomes involving self-fulfillment and personal growth. People with a high sense of personal identity expressed a preference for occupations that offered a chance to be creative, a job consistent with personal values, an opportunity to use their abilities to their fullest, the possibility to reach personal goals in life, and the opportunity to have a great deal of input. Instructors can generate some in-class discussion by asking students to comment on how they feel their identity orientation might serve to influence their choice of a major, occupational choice, and/or career aspirations.

Selected References

The following resources can be used by instructors as resources for developing supplemental lecture material on identity orientations:

Cheek, J. M. (1989). Identity orientations and self-interpretation. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions (pp. 275–285). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Cheek, J. M., & Briggs, S. R. (1981, August). Self-consciousness, self-monitoring, and aspects of identity. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles.

Cheek, J. M., & Briggs, S. R. (1982). Self-consciousness and aspects of identity. Journal of Research in Personality, 16, 401–408.

Leary, M. R., Wheeler, D. S., & Jenkins, T. B. (1986). Aspects of identity and behavioral preference: Studies of occupational and recreational choice. Social Psychology Quarterly, 49, 11–18.

Discussion

This teaching activity poster is designed to provide a self-contained teaching module on aspects of identity orientation. It can be used to illustrate an example of a contemporary area of research on the topic of the self-concept and/or a topic to support more traditional lecture material on the topic of the self-concept, such as self-esteem and self-monitoring. This teaching activity can be utilized in such classes as personality psychology, psychology of adjustment, clinical psychology, and counseling psychology, as well as other courses in which the topic of the self-concept is discussed (e.g., personality section of an introductory psychology course).

Estimated time for the lecture, in-class activity, and post-activity discussion: 20 to 30 minutes

References

Allport, G. W. (1961). Pattern and growth in personality. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Banaji, M. R., & Prentice, D. A. (1994). The self in social context. In L. W. Porter & M. R. Rosenzweig (Eds.), Annual review of psychology (Vol. 45, pp. 297–332). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews Inc.

Cheek, J. M. (1989). Identity orientations and self-interpretation. In D. M. Buss & N. Cantor (Eds.), Personality psychology: Recent trends and emerging directions (pp. 275–285). New York: Springer-Verlag.

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Hogan, R., & Cheek, J. M. (1983). Identity, authenticity, and maturity. In T. R. Sarbin & K. E. Scheibe (Eds.), Studies in social identity (pp. 339–357). New York: Praeger.

James, W. (1890). The principles of psychology (Vol. 1). New York: Holt.

Leary, M. R., Wheeler, D. S., & Jenkins, T. B. (1986). Aspects of identity and behavioral preference: Studies of occupational and recreational choice. Social Psychology Quarterly, 49, 11–18.